



The Penny King

I'll tell you something in a time period were you or me or Joe Q public only makes about 15 dollars a month the penny king walks around with bags of pennys, enough to pay 11 men's wages for a week with only one bag. He has so much money that he goes around like some sort of good king and don't get me wrong everybody loves him. He helps sick people and the older folks the down trodden but he hates the nogoodnecks, although he wouldn't say he hates anyone in fact he loves people to a fault from where some of us sit but hay looking in on somebody eaten dinner when you haven't eaten in days is just plain rude. So I will move on to my story the king makes his way into everyone's story but his deeds should only be bragged about if he want to say something. I hang out most days at the penny arcade with the king and a couple of buds. I am a pinball board maker an original gamer. I have great memories of the old bagatelle games and how I would make it

rich one day the penny arcade would be my Nutty Mad or Combat Bagatelle I was going to... well I hang out every day at the penny arcade I get 1\$ a board but I make most of my living like everyone else on the strand or under any bridge in middle class anywhere, I am a hardscrabbler with a small box garden and a few boards here and there I do alright at least better then the shmoes that pour out thousands of dollars a year at least to the king. He walks around his penny arcade making sure everyone is taken care of and they are having fun, he always has a penny for the little ones and the lady's and any sap with a sad tale to tell. I guess he would give anything for anybody. He loves my newest board it's a double flipper with bells and pipes and really nice art an eagle coming in for a field mouse talons out beak open it has a dark purple beat juice stain with the eagle a light stain of simple wood grain I gave it to him 3 days ago and last night he put 2 dollars in my jacket pocket. I looked puzzled

at him he grinned and out the side of his mouth he whispered “keep’em comin like that son and you’ll be the prince of pinball.” I was shocked the honor I feel like I am good but my ideas are not my own and my style is such as it is a rather thrown together process, I will tell you if had proper stain there is no way I would have gave the king a purple pinball board just the sounds of it is marketing nightmare P.P.B.B. like pee pee baby well I got my money and some more orders but my reputation was the pee pee baby builder. My buds were supportive of my games they had seen me through some hard times so I kind of let them lean on me at times you know when times get tough. I guess that’s why the king smiles and gives us a big thumbs up every time he sees us we are like the underground town council and I say underground due to the one fact about the king, he is not exactly above board the governor is trying to outlaw snooker and pinball Bagatelle and a host of other penny

games, even the Mutoscope which showed you film snippets usually of dancing girls, they claim it's lude titty pictures that keep men away from the women that love them and make them spend all their pay lusting after tramps, and that it is going to turn men into amoral molesters. I am glad whenever they make something underground it makes a lot more money not that I am a capitalist or anything, I would just like to help people like the king. I disappear for periods of time nobody knows where I am going or where I have been but I will tell you I travelled the bagatelle trail I played with jesters in the court of madness I have been to no man's land of the penny arcade the underbelly of pinball and the smile from Satan if the reverend was right that we are all sinners for gambling and going to hell were we will be forced to play pinball and other arcade games until our fingers bleed and our balls turn to steel. I really don't know about all that but I can play those penny games until I

am broke and on Sunday morning if the devil offered me another game on him well sirs I would do it. I am a realist if it's not real here and now I will think on it later. But pinball is real and for some working stiff's it's the only way they got to blow off steam. These games for me are a lifelong interest, and for the penny king he has made a tidy little fortune one cent at a time. Other guys like the governor think it is an organized crime game lure people into gambling sin den's to take all of a hard working man's pay and that is the case with some places but the king was clean and for the most part fair and on the level, we talked at the arcade about moving around so the coppers don't get wise to us but the king knew this business, I was just a board builder. I was hanging out front talking to the guys when I saw somebody playing the purple eagle that's what the king called it but he loved it, this person was impressed by the game and before I could make it to the they went up to

talk to the king they gave him a card and walked out brushing up against my arm as they left. I gave them a look that said he is our king don't mess with him and how do you do. The king asked me to come into the back office for a minute, we sat silent for a while I waited to hear what was going on and the king just smiled and said "you are such a purest, do you hate money or something?"

I looked puzzled and said "the king has the penny's to pay for a smile but I ain't seen real money for a very long while in fact I never really think about the money it makes me feel bad." The king looked sad then perked up "I know how to make you happy I will make you rich, huh huh what do ya think?" I say to him kind of doubting "I thought you where the penny king not king midis" he told me that all the boards I make for him are worth 10-35\$ each to collectors but more he told me that each pinball game can make a thousand a month, I was

shocked he told me we would talk more tomorrow “ I have to see a man about renting space down the coast,” ”you’re not moving are you?” he cut me off ”no no heavens no I would never leave here, even if the governor says these games are illegal I will stay and fight them in court mark my words.” I slept light that night nightmares of ringing and binging lights and sound flashing intertwining games that were simple boxes with whole universes contained inside It was an arcade but in hell or something, games you road on and games were you got into them literally galls had long hair but the gents had even longer hair a times like a band of natives but these ones had spikes up their arms and hellish slogans on their jackets like “Mommy can I go out and Kill tonight” that’s one of the only ones I could remember it was just so aggressive and yet polite is this a nightmare or a vision of the future I hoped it was a nightmare. I always woke up with a jarring and sweating

always when I awake it is the next day, no time feels like it passed but there I am a little closer to the end. I started working on another board but I could not stop thinking about the king being poor like me and me being rich a thousand dollars a month I could not even imagine that for one month little lone an ongoing salary. I went down to the penny arcade but today I had a mission the king would be gone most of the day so me and my two buds played pinball all day at noon we went to my place for a salad and we played some of my prototypes. They asked me why I always made these boards the same “you could make them really cluttered and strange” I told them there are two kinds of pinball, 1:very hard to play were the ball is against you, these games are over fast and are made to make money. I think the number two way is the best, 2: the game is so playable that people get tired of playing before they lose the game. I try and make them a little in between. My buds

thought it was cool that the design of the board can change things that much. “say, is there any boards that you know of that are next to impossible to play?” I told them of this game that sat in a dark arena like a boxing match people pay 25cents to wait in line for a few hours sometimes to be told by these scary door man types, that you must leave without playing and you do have to go. I went on to say “the game is like hell itself and if you can play it even for a bit a large guy comes out in an executioner’s mask and a large axe, he returns to the shadows. “Why would people pay that much just too maybe play this hell game?” because I told him “you can win 25 dollars for playing it for 20 seconds or more. “Have you ever played it?” I told them about the time I went there but they pegged me as a ringer(a guy that can play any bagatelle derived game including pinball,) I got kicked out but I was thinking of going back just to try it. We went over to the spot but it

was only open at night but we found a dropped time sheet with their hours that's how we would find out about the penny arcades and these events just leaf through a free newspaper until you find an advert stashed in there about games, or like this just blowing in the wind like some kind of natural courier service. We went back to the penny arcade talked about how scary that place was and how it sounds like a satanic cult game were is you won they will sacrifice you to the pinball gods they had almost a rock show feel but this game was all that was going on. I told the guys "don't mention that place or game to the king ok he hates those kinds of people and he gets a little mad, here he is not a word boys not a word," I followed the king into his office and asked "how did things go up the coast?" The king looked a little out of sorts" what, oh fine it went fine I need another board from you by next week." Sure I told him no problem." He snapped out of his funk and

got all happy so he said we were talking about your hate for money.” “That’s not the case I said I just don’t have the opportunities of the rich like you.” “ha ha ha ha .” he bellowed and I thought he may dismount his chair rather abruptly but he maintained and he leaned into me and said” I made every opportunity I ever had when I started this penny arcade I had nothing, I offered the landlord to let me fix it up in lou of paying rent. He was so pleased that he waved the rent for three months.” He told me this is the point where he employed my services and had me build the first 3 games that made him 300 dollars in the first three months, that covered the purchasing of other games like, baffle ball and the execution but all the people that came in to play were all over my games. The king made me think why am I so poor when he made his money, I guess I am just an artist at heart destine to be poor, forever seeking praise instead of pays. I left his office thinking about the money he was

making and all off my games so I set out with my buds again we went back to the dark pinball venue we found in the insert from the news paper. “I will show you both this game sent straight from hell.”

We spent 75 cents to get in, the door man looked at my buds and stated rather rudely”these two got no chance you look like a ringer, we are watching.” After 1 hour we saw many people got kicked out before they even got to this terrifying pinball game. We made it to the game my friends both lost the ball after 5 seconds, it was my turn I approached the barbed wire ring and stepped up to this pinball game if you could call it that it was more like a torture devise made to distract I played the spike ridden game on to 10 seconds and 11 and 12 and at 13 a guy in an executioners mask came out and stood by me chanting ringer ringer and the attendant also chanting under his breath” ringer ringer ringer.” At the 18 second I was so full of anxiety that I almost threw the

game but I went to 20 seconds and as the buzzer went off the whole crowd was chanting ringer ringer ringer and as the buzzer went off they all went silent the executioner went back into the darkness off the stage like ring of barbed wire. The attendant looked at me all was silent he whispered “are you a ringer?” I looked surprised to be alive after making it for over 20 seconds I replied “no I am a board maker but of a lower caliber then the man who made this board,” he laughed and as he was handing me the 25 dollar prize he stated as a matter of fact “this board wasn’t made by a man, it was made by the devil himself found in the basement of the Denver state hospital.” He laughed shaking his head at my ignorance then he yelled “get out! Everybody its over for tonight!” we ran like a stampede noise was going of sirens lights flashing the executioner came out swinging it was quite the sceptical scary for most of us. I went away for a few days to work on

the new board for the King. I waited at the penny arcade early before going away for another few days I was kind of short with the king I collected the money and gave him the board. I returned after being gone for over a month it was late at the penny arcade the king had hired some guys to take bets on certain games this was the governors problem with these games the tax man wanted his cut and gamblers were sinners and prisoners to be. I was there when the g-men came in storming the arcade they arrested the king he yelled at me “you go get me a couple bags of pennies from the back room meet me at the station.” I need you guys to look after the arcade while I bail out the king” I took charge and delegated so the arcade was locked up and the people got out for tonight. When I went to the copper shop they were all friendly like they were just doing this to appease the governor who arrived moment after I did. He took charge of the whole thing and started in on the king

about gambling den of thieves and other not so flattering words about his livelihood. He finally stopped his rant and the king simply replied” It not a game of chance it is a game of skill and I can prove it but I will only do that if you drop this witch hunt the governor agreed but only because he really was just being pressured by people who hated these games and believed that idle hand make the devil’s work. I bailed the king out we walked home the long way past the hell board game arena the king asked”what’s that place?” I brushed it off by saying”Oh it’s nothing so how are you going to make sure the governor stays true to his word?” “don’t you worry you are going to help by doing what I know you can do, play pinball better then a first timer and just keep on playing for as long as you can.” I loved this idea but in the coming weeks it became all consuming the talk on the street the side bets the news radio, everybody was talking about it up and down the coast. I was nervous

would we be arrested if we lost but like a cow crossing and the executioner there was no reason to fear the unknown. We walked past a penny arcade a ways from his arcade it was very classy and hardly looked like an arcade all it had was some really expensive boards and some guy that looked even richer than the king, he looked sad like his world was over he had just been bested."Maybe my time is done what do you think?" I told him everything happens for a reason and maybe his true calling was to legitimise pinball and insure it a place in the future. He smiled always looking on the bright side that's why I like you. We kept walking until I found myself in the morning outside the penny arcade reading a sign closed until the governors men come for their contest. This was set for three more weeks to give time to the press to get some hype going on. This contest was going to prove that pinball and other bagatelle games were games of skill not luck and chance, thus proving that

pinball and penny arcade were more akin to sports not roulette or other gambling staples. The king noticed that I was very absent in the days leading up to what would be known as the gamble for pinball. People were saying they were already dropping pinball games in the water and getting out of dodge. We were making a stand for the right to play games, this had been our pastime for generations if they took that from us what would we do just work and pay and work and pay and all work and no play makes us all not so ok. I had distance myself from the penny arcade to allow people to see me as a separate entity from the penny king so they could not accuse us of being bias. My friends came over to my place to play games again on my prototypes. I told again about the dreams there was a game called pool it was like snooker and bagatelle but there was a game like no other game a screen like in the moving picture shows but a worse hell then Haxan or Dante's inferno it scared me

just to see it but the players were even more scary and they seemed to relish the devil. Maybe the reverend was right that all gamers will go to hell and that pinball was sent from the devil. This dream made it look like the road to hell was paved with pinball and q-ball and games. My buddy's laughed and stated "If all that is true I am going to hell for looking at that cute blonde down town at the candy shop and in fact the reverend is always passing judgment and going to church. "Ok I have to ask, why do you think going to church will condemn him to hell?" He tells me "the bible itself not only says judge not lest ye be judged yourself and I am the lord and it is for no mortal man to pass judgment on any other man." I had to admit and reply "good point." I hope this is just a bad dream but I fear it is a vision of what's to come. "stop talking like that you need to represent pinball in front of the governor soon and if you lose arcades could be outlawed." I knew what was at

stake but I was conflicted I now was concerned for the moral structure of the game players, I didn't want to be the cause of the world's downfall into hell and I had already gained a new view of the dark side of these pinball games it was scary. My buds assured there is two kinds of boards and the ones I make are playable and nice the other kind were sent from hell because they try and rip you off your hard earned money, "true that." I said not knowing where that statement came from maybe it was lingo from my dreams. I was gone a lot these days so me and the king had not talked, I checked for the advert in the paper the one you sometimes find for new game spots. There was a message but it was not a game spot it was from the king and it read, "The penny king needs players skilled or otherwise for a private event closed and very important." I walked as I read the note getting a little annoyed I go see the king, his door is locked the note says back door knock three and then

one wait and then two. So like the code I knock the king opens the door I am overwhelmed with emotion I start flailing at him not really punching as he is a lot bigger. The king is very hurt and confused until the note falls on the floor he smiles and says “listen friend this note was put there for you I needed you to be here and I had no idea where you were.” I felt like a heel he told me that the governor had announced a secret match between regular sinners and unskilled pinball players, I heard’ he has an Amish couple that forbid pinball or idle game playing but they are going to be the other players, but he said he needs two guys that are very skilled at playing pinball.”I know another guy that’s just as good as me maybe even better” I tell him but he interrupts as I am saying maybe even better to say, “not your buddy’s no offence meaning but they can’t play pinball very well and we cannot have a failure.” He explained “there is one group that says if the game pinball is a game

of chance then it is gambling but if it a game of skill then all is good we win the rights to play games.” When bagatelle was invented it was to amuse the king and no not the king of pennys, but for king Lois XIV of France but now it has become a tool of the devil to deflower our young girls and burn our morals like a walk on the mid day sun.

When I play pinball or bagatelle games I feel like a king just for a while I imagine a kingdom where you must play these kinds of games not the social one’s that are becoming so popular, talking about people behind their back, creating a scapegoat like pinball to pin your woes on, and just play a game to relax. The fire water is a big problem as well but most penny arcades are like soda shops if they even have drinks. I stayed with the king and we worked on making the games all look similar and just generally cleaning up the place. ”Just some paint,” I told him “all people see is a miss mash of color if these arcades get more uniform we may have a

chance at becoming legit.” The king was still a little concerned about the pornographic claim that was completely unfounded I reminded him that in such a conservative time any girl dressed not like a school girl or nun is considered promiscuous, there for you can please some of the people some of the time but at no time can you please them all. We kept working on the arcade fixing wobbles in the legs of the boards making everything tip top, even though the governor wants the venue to be a secret most people in town know the kings arcade. We talked about places like sport land arcade that was above board following all the rules set out by the governor and his henchmen all across the country. We talked about games” I really wanted a Mill’s liberty bell.” The king said as he hung his head because that game there was no question it was like a slot machine that you could bet on, if he had that or Fey’s liberty bell no chance because that was the issue no games

of chance unless there is no chance of winning money. I told the king about the St. Luis world's fair and how I heard about the mill's arcade but those places don't focus on the pinball and bagatelle derived games. "I swear if they don't stop us next week by 1980's there will be arcades everywhere, pinball and bagatelle boards in all of them," I told the king "if he does the future will only be what O.D. Jennings and company want us to play." He looked frustrated with all this talk the king set up a big speech on a large soapbox that boiled down to" If that happens free enterprise is done craftsmen board builders are done and life will be the gamble, regulated by the regulators and yes governed by the governor," whom the king felt was in bed with the ministers and PTA committees in there silver balled witch hunt. The time was approaching and I needed to go away again before the big day I told the king"dude I have to go I will be back closer to the governors arrival and I will bring my

ringer buddy for you to meet.” The king just gestured a goodbye and with a nod he disappeared into the back room I walked the streets around the other end of town making sure I was not being followed but what I didn’t know is not only was the king following a very far distance behind me, and the governor sent out the coppers to follow the king though I don’t think they know where he is going or even that he was following me. I got to the classy arcade across town, the one the king and I had passed a while back, as I entered I took one last look at the street and the king saw me but I still had not spotted him. The king led the coppers on a tour of places he wanted to bring attention to. There was distilleries illegal card hall gambling was rampant but not a one dealt with pinball these places were run by the mafia and bike gangs of old British postal workers that came here and just ride and extort money any way they can. These were all the people that had caused

the governor to get on our case were as I figured as well as my buds and the king agrees, that all those crime organizations were getting the blind eye by the man and we are getting the bug eye and it should be the other way around. I went into this arcade that we had seen the whole thing reeked of money ornate pillars no doubt cardboard tube with sand and a clever marble paint job all the games appeared to be pinball with glass covering except one a David Johnson original shooting game, not a Walter Tratsch that was becoming more popular. This little industry was as cutthroat as Hollywood they are rivals then they are partners. This arcade had a style all its own there was no gambling games and no nude slide show games high class all the way. I approached what looked to be the man in charge and as I began talking to him. The king who had lost the coppers a while back had made his way to just outside the arcade I was in trying hard not to be seen the king watched in

anger, feeling betrayed he saw enough and left. I would try for the next few days to find the king after I got worked up into a tizzy I figured the best way to find him would be follow the coppers and yes indeed they led me right to him. We talked about the other night I explained “that was the ringer I was talking to you about and he had a great plan to bring in cigar girls and get rid of all the picture games as they are not actually games and the governor doesn’t need more ammo.” The king agreed but”If you know that guy and that place why would you help make my place a lot more like that one and yet not let on that you know that place when you most obviously do know that place, and a lot about it?” he asked with a bitter taint to his voice like we could no longer be friend unless in the next 30 seconds I said the right thing, “I didn’t want you to be offended at the changes, you are the king you didn’t need my help other than a pair of hands to help out it could have been anyone.” The

king perked up “ no my friend it had to be you, there is a spark or a love of these games that really nobody has, sure I like these games because I make lots of money off them but you have no motivation other then the love of the game.” He went on to say “I think you are the reincarnation of king Lois, you are also a king my friend, a king among men” we were all good after that making some last minute clean ups the door bell rang it was my buddy, we let him in and the king noticed as he entered he called me sir. The king was puzzled but none the less we had very little time and the news would be there and the dreaded governor. People started arriving though it was an unpublicized location everyone knew where it was and the governor made sure he told them when it was as well as who would be there again the bell rang but this time it was official. It was the governor his copper buddies the news guys and a couple of others like the minister and a representative

from the PTA there was also a couple of square looking kids like teens but they were nerdy and not in a good way.

The terms are set the governor states to the media “The game of chance called pinball will today show that our youth is being lured down into debt and poverty by these devil games and that all of these establishments if today is found to prove this, will be shut down fines and all the pinball barkers will pay restitution to the public who has been scammed by the devil himself!” A resounding “Amen!” echoed back like a cult following their leaders words “Amen that this will be a fair judging!” I exclaimed to the crowd they all echoed me with an “Amen” and then laughter drowned out the reverend and the governor’s call for order the king stated to the governor directly “this is a fair witch hunt I hope the church and state usually don’t get in bed over games should I have gotten a lawyer?” we all laughed. Gaining control of the situation the

governor goes on with the terms as we add little comments relentlessly to entertain our people that were showing support.”The game will be played first by our ringers” thinking he meant us we stepped towards the first game my pee pee baby board he stopped us half way and said “no no we are the visitor so our ringers go first” we looked at each other scared and as these guys walk all cracking there knuckles we think it is all over. The girls come around to our side and we all get our smoke on. “This is going to be very bad” the king says to me as I am already nodding agreeing with him. I asked my buddy from the other arcade who seemed more interested in the smoke girls then this whole process. I had to ask “why are you not shitting right now?” he leaned over and blew smoke in my face and said “I am the ringer in this room and I know every ringer in this town and along most of this sea board, these guys are not ringers.” The ball went to the board now it was all on the

ball was a sand grain in an hour glass it seemed to stay in play forever but a few short moments and like a needle at the doctor's office, it was over, the next ringer for the governor was even worse it was like he never played the game before. The governor looked all smug and proud of his ringers. Now just to recap, if they win being unskilled at this game of chance it proves that this is a game of chance but if we win it proves it is a game of skill it is a time thing that these ringers just timed out at 3 min and 29 seconds in total for the pair of them. Showing no emotion the king takes the time to say a short speech "this game pinball has its roots in a royal pass time the game if respected can be played for a long time the goal is to play for a long time to get your penny out of it but money and betting is ruining this sport I am here to prove that skill will win out over these so called ringers for I didn't bring two ringers I brought men who love this game, one is a pinball board

builder the other an unofficial historian of the game.” The cameras rolled as the king just sun this into a whole awareness thing and with this look on the event it looked like the governor was there to support that like making peace sharing the olive branch. I went first and my game lasted 1 hour and a half due to the fact that it was my board. My buddy started playing and at the 3 hour mark with no signs of letting up the governor who was now enjoying smokes and soda had already conceded to the news that had also abandoned the mission of persecution and had joined the party the minister had left his ringers who were making new friends. The day was won by the penny king and as the event came to an end the penny king asked once again about that other arcade. “I took your advice and made a deal with a guy who had lost his tenant who had already paid for the full month and he let me make upgrades to make it look nice.” The king with a look of understanding kind of that maybe I had

also started penny arcade was interrupted as he was about to confirm this thought, by my buddy who now addressed me as boss and stated “I am taking the girls back to your place ok boss?” and I told him with a smirk “yes that would be fine I will catch up to pay everyone in a bit.” He left and the penny king looked all proud of his new protégée and with all the honor of a king he declared “You too are now a penny king!” I felt more than vindicated I had a sense that I was a part of a royal history that now would live on, and there would be pinball and bagatelle games in rooms like this with lights sound and poor people becoming penny kings themselves free enterprise.

Story by: Reverend Steve Warner
2015-07-13